

Will o' the Mill

STEVENSON

David O. McKay Library

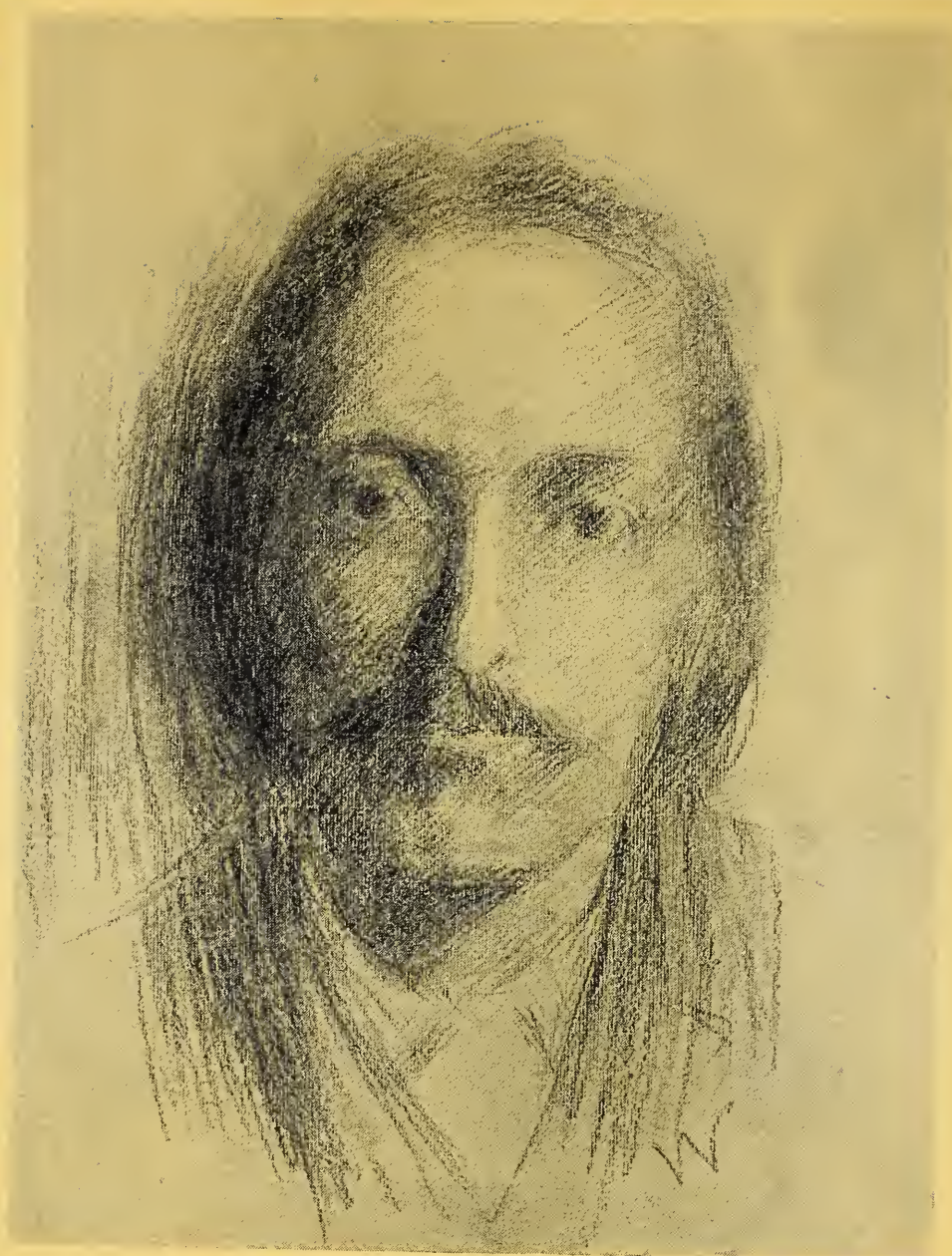



SpC
PR
5487
W5
1901



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/stevensonwill>





WILL O' THE MILL

by Master Robert
Louis Stevenson



DONE INTO A BOOK
AT THE ROYCROFT
SHOP, WHICH IS IN
EAST AURORA, NEW
YORK--PRESSWORK
COMPLETED ON THIS
THE NINETEENTH
DAY OF NOVEMBER
ANNO DOMINI MCMI

Copyright, 1901, by Elbert Hubbard.

TO WILL H. LOW

Youth now flees on feathered foot,
Faint and fainter sounds the flute,
Rarer songs of gods; and still,
Somewhere on the sunny hill,
Or along the winding stream,
Through the willows, flits a dream;
Flits, but shows a smiling face,
Flees, but with so quaint a grace
None can choose to stay at home—
All must follow, all must roam.

This is unborn beauty: she
Now in air floats high and free,
Takes the sun and breaks the blue;
Late with stooping pinion flew
Raking hedgerow trees, and wet
Her wing in silver streams, and set
Shining foot on temple roof:
Now again she flies aloof,
Coasting mountain clouds and kiss'd
By the evening's amethyst.

—R. L. STEVENSON

Will o' the Mill

THE PLAIN AND THE STARS



HE mill where Will lived with his adopted parents stood in a falling valley between pine woods and great mountains. Above, hill after hill soared upwards until they soared out of the depth of the hardest timber, and stood naked against the sky. Some way up, a long gray village lay like a seam or a rag of vapor on a wooded hillside; and, when the wind was favorable, the sound of the church bells would drop down, thin and silvery, to Will. Below, the valley grew ever steeper and steeper, and at the same time widened out on either hand; and from an eminence beside the mill it was possible to see its whole length and away beyond it over a wide plain, where the river turned and shone, and moved on from city to city on its voyage towards the sea. It chanced that over this valley there lay a pass into a neighboring kingdom; so that, quiet and rural

**Will o' the
Mill**

as it was, the road that ran along beside the river was a high thoroughfare between two splendid and powerful societies. All through the summer travelling-carriages came crawling up, or went plunging briskly downwards past the mill; and as it happened that the other side was very much easier of ascent, the path was not much frequented, except by people going in one direction; and of all the carriages that Will saw go by, five-sixths were plunging briskly downwards and only one-sixth crawling up. Much more was this the case with foot-passengers. All the light-footed tourists, all the pedlers laden with strange wares, were tending downwards like the river that accompanied their path. Nor was this all; for when Will was yet a child a disastrous war arose over a great part of the world. The newspapers were full of defeats and victories, the earth rang with cavalry hoofs, and often for days together and for miles around the coil of battle terrified good people from their labors in the field. Of all this nothing was heard for a long time in the valley; but at last one of the commanders pushed an army over the pass by

forced marches, and for three days horse and foot, cannon and tumbril, drum and standard, kept pouring downwards past the mill. All day the child stood and watched them on their passage. The rhythmical stride, the pale, unshaven faces, tanned about the eyes, the discolored regimentals, and the tattered flags, filled him with a sense of weariness, pity, and wonder; and all night long, after he was in bed, he could hear the cannon pounding and the feet trampling, and the great armament sweeping onwards and downwards past the mill. No one in the valley ever heard the fate of the expedition, for they lay out of the way of gossip in those troublous times; but Will saw one thing plainly,—that not a man returned. Whither had they all gone? Whither went all the tourists and pedlers with strange wares? Whither all the brisk barouches with servants in the dicky? Whither the water of the stream, ever coursing downwards and ever renewed from above? Even the wind blew oftener down the valley, and carried the dead leaves along with it in the fall. It seemed like a great conspiracy of things animate and inanimate: they all went

Will o' the
Mill

Will o' the downwards, fleetly and gayly downwards, and
Mill only he, it seemed, remained behind, like a stock
upon the wayside. It sometimes made him glad
when he noticed how the fishes kept their heads
up stream. They, at least, stood faithfully by
him, while all else were posting downwards
to the unknown world.

One evening he asked the miller where the
river went.

“It goes down the valley,” answered he, “and
turns a power of mills—sixscore mills, they
say, from here to Unterdeck—and is none the
wearier after all. And then it goes out into the
lowlands, and waters the great corn country,
and runs through a sight of fine cities (so they
say) where kings live all alone in great palaces,
with a sentry walking up and down before the
door. And it goes under bridges with stone
men upon them, looking down and smiling so
curious at the water, and living folks leaning
their elbows on the wall and looking over too.
And then it goes on, and on, and down through
marshes and sands, until at last it falls into the
sea, where the ships are that bring parrots and
tobacco from the Indies. Ay, it has a long trot

before it as it goes singing over our weir, bless its heart!"

**Will o' the
Mill**

"And what is the sea?" asked Will.

"The sea!" cried the miller. "Lord help us all, it is the greatest thing God made! That is where all the water in the world runs down into a great salt lake. There it lies as flat as my hand and as innocent-like as a child; but they do say when the wind blows it gets up into water-mountains bigger than any of ours, and swallows down great ships bigger than our mill, and makes such a roaring that you can hear it miles away upon the land. There are great fish in it five times bigger than a bull, and one old serpent as long as our river, and as old as all the world, with whiskers like a man, and a crown of silver on her head."

Will thought he had never heard anything like this, and he kept on asking question after question about the world that lay away down the river, with all its perils and marvels, until the old miller became quite interested himself, and at last took him by the hand and led him to the hilltop that overlooks the valley and the plain. The sun was near setting, and hung low

Will o' the down in a cloudless sky. Everything was de-
mill fined and glorified in golden light. Will had never seen so great an expanse of country in his life; he stood and gazed with all his eyes. He could see the cities, and the woods and fields, and the bright curves of the river, and far away to where the rim of the plain trenched along the shining heavens. An overmastering emotion seized upon the boy, soul and body; his heart beat so thickly that he could not breathe; the scene swam before his eyes; the sun seemed to wheel round and round, and throw off, as it turned, strange shapes which disappeared with the rapidity of thought, and were succeeded by others. Will covered his face with his hands, and burst into a violent fit of tears; and the poor miller, sadly disappointed and perplexed, saw nothing better for it than to take him up in his arms and carry him home in silence.

From that day forward Will was full of new hopes and longings. Something kept tugging at his heart-strings; the running water carried his desires along with it as he dreamed over its fleeting surface; the wind, as it ran over

innumerable tree-tops, hailed him with encouraging words; branches beckoned downwards; the open road, as it shouldered round the angles, and went turning and vanishing fast and faster down the valley, tortured him with its solicitations. He spent long whiles on the eminence, looking down the river-shed and abroad on the flat lowlands, and watched the clouds that travelled forth upon the sluggish wind and trailed their purple shadows on the plain; or he would linger by the wayside, and follow the carriages with his eyes as they rattled downwards by the river. It did not matter what it was; everything that went that way, were it cloud or carriage, bird or brown water in the stream, he felt his heart flow out after it in an ecstasy of longing.

We are told by men of science that all the ventures of mariners on the sea, all that counter-marching of tribes and races that confounds old history with its dust and rumor, sprang from nothing more abstruse than the laws of supply and demand, and a certain natural instinct for cheap rations. To any one thinking deeply, this will seem a dull and pitiful expla-

Will o' the nation. The tribes that came swarming out of
Mill the North and East, if they were indeed pressed
onward from behind by others, were drawn at
the same time by the magnetic influence of the
South and West. The fame of other lands had
reached them; the name of the Eternal City
rang in their ears; they were not colonists, but
pilgrims; they travelled toward wine and gold,
and sunshine, but their hearts were set on
something higher. That divine unrest, that old
stinging trouble of humanity that makes all high
achievements and all miserable failure, the
same that spread wings with Icarus, the same
that sent Columbus into the desolate Atlantic,
inspired and supported these barbarians on
their perilous march. There is one legend which
profoundly represents their spirit, of how a fly-
ing party of these wanderers encountered a
very old man shod with iron. The old man asked
them whither they were going; and they an-
swered with one voice, "To the Eternal City!"
He looked upon them gravely. "I have sought
it," he said, "over the most part of the world.
Three such pairs as I now carry on my feet
have I worn out upon this pilgrimage, and now

the fourth is growing slender underneath my **Will o' the**
steps. And all this while I have not found the **Mill**
city." And he turned and went his own way
alone, leaving them astonished.

And yet this would scarcely parallel the intensity of Will's feeling for the plain. If he could only go far enough out there, he felt as if his eyesight would be purged and clarified, as if his hearing would grow more delicate, and his very breath would come and go with luxury. He was transplanted and withering where he was; he lay in a strange country and was sick for home. Bit by bit, he pieced together broken notions of the world below: of the river, ever moving and growing until it sailed forth into the majestic ocean; of the cities, full of brisk and beautiful people, playing fountains, bands of music, and marble palaces, and lighted up at night from end to end with artificial stars of gold; of the great churches, wise universities, brave armies, and untold money lying stored in vaults; of the high-flying vice that moved in the sunshine, and the stealth and swiftness of midnight murder. I have said he was sick as if for home; the figure halts. He was like some

**Will o' the
Mill** one lying in twilit, formless pre-existence, and stretching out his hands, lovingly, toward many-colored, many-sounding life. It was no wonder he was unhappy, he would go and tell the fish; they were made for their life, wished for no more than worms and running water, and a hole below a falling bank; but he was differently designed, full of desires and aspirations, itching at the fingers, lusting with the eyes, whom the whole variegated world could not satisfy with aspects. The true life, the true bright sunshine, lay far out upon the plain. And oh to see this sunlight once before he died! to move with a jocund spirit in a golden land! to hear the trained singers and sweet church bells, and see the holiday gardens! "And O fish!" he would cry, "if you would only turn your noses down stream, you could swim so easily into the fabled waters, and see the vast ships passing over your head like clouds, and hear the great water-hills making music over you all day long!" But the fish kept looking patiently in their own direction, until Will hardly knew whether to laugh or cry.

Hitherto the traffic on the road had passed

by Will like something seen in a picture: he had perhaps exchanged salutations with a tourist, or caught sight of an old gentleman in a travelling-cap at a carriage window; but for the most part it had been a mere symbol, which he contemplated from apart and with something of a superstitious feeling. A time came at last when this was to be changed. The miller, who was a greedy man in his way, and never forewent an opportunity of honest profit, turned the mill-house into a little wayside inn, and, several pieces of good fortune falling in opportunely, built stables and got the position of postmaster on the road. It now became Will's duty to wait upon people, as they sat to break their fasts in the little arbor at the top of the mill garden; and you may be sure that he kept his ears open, and learned many new things about the outside world as he brought the omelette or the wine. Nay, he would often get into conversation with single guests, and by adroit questions and polite attention, not only gratify his own curiosity, but win the good-will of the travellers. Many complimented the old couple on their serving-boy; and a professor was eager

Will o' the
Mill

Will o' the to take him away with him, and have him
Mill properly educated in the plain. The miller and his wife were mightily astonished and even more pleased. They thought it a very good thing that they should have opened their inn. "You see," the old man would remark, "he has a kind of talent for a publican; he never would have made anything else!" And so life wagged on in the valley, with high satisfaction to all concerned but Will. Every carriage that left the inn door seemed to take a part of him away with it; and when people jestingly offered him a lift, he could with difficulty command his emotion. Night after night he would dream that he was awakened by flustered servants, and that a splendid equipage waited at the door to carry him down into the plain—night after night, until the dream, which had seemed all jollity to him at first, began to take on a color of gravity, and the nocturnal summons and waiting equipage occupied a place in his mind as something to be both feared and hoped for.

¶ One day, when Will was about sixteen, a fat young man arrived at sunset to pass the night. He was a contented-looking fellow, with a jolly

eye, and carried a knapsack. While dinner was preparing he sat in the arbor to read a book; but as soon as he had begun to observe Will, the book was laid aside: he was plainly one of those who prefer living people to people made of ink and paper. Will, on his part, although he had not been much interested in the stranger at first sight, soon began to take a great deal of pleasure in his talk, which was full of good nature and good sense, and at last conceived a great respect for his character and wisdom. They sat far into the night; and about two in the morning Will opened his heart to the young man, and told him how he longed to leave the valley and what bright hopes he had connected with the cities of the plain. The young man whistled and broke into a smile. ¶ “My young friend,” he remarked, “you are a very curious little fellow, to be sure, and wish a great many things which you will never get. Why, you would feel quite ashamed if you knew how the little fellows in these fairy cities of yours are all after the same sort of nonsense, and keep breaking their hearts to get up into the mountains. And let me tell you, those who

Will o' the Mill go down into the plains are a very short while there before they wish themselves heartily back again. The air is not so light nor so pure; nor is the sun any brighter. As for the beautiful men and women, you would see many of them in rags, and many of them deformed with horrible disorders; and a city is so hard a place for people who are poor & sensitive that many choose to die by their own hand."

"You must think me very simple," answered Will. "Although I have never been out of this valley, believe me, I have used my eyes ~~for~~ I know how one thing lives on another; for instance, how the fish hangs in the eddy to catch his fellows; and the shepherd, who makes so pretty a picture carrying home the lamb, is only carrying it home for dinner. I do not expect to find all things right in your cities. That is not what troubles me; it might have been once upon a time; but although I live here always, I have asked many questions & learned a great deal in these last years, and certainly enough to cure me of my old fancies. But you would not have me die like a dog and not see all that is to be seen, and do all that a man can

do, let it be good or evil? You would not have me spend all my days between this road here and the river, and not so much as make a motion to be up and live my life?—I would rather die out of hand," he cried, "than linger on as I am doing."

"Thousands of people," said the young man, "live and die like you, and are none the less happy."

"Ah!" said Will, "if there are thousands who would like, why should not one of them have my place?"

It was quite dark; there was a hanging lamp in the arbor which lit up the table & the faces of the speakers; and along the arch, the leaves upon the trellis stood out illuminated against the night sky, a pattern of transparent green upon a dusky purple. The fat young man rose, and, taking Will by the arm, led him out under the open heavens.

"Did you ever look at the stars?" he asked, pointing upwards.

"Often and often," answered Will.

"And do you know what they are?"

"I have fancied many things."

Will o' the "They are worlds like ours," said the young
Mill man. "Some of them less; many of them a million times greater; and some of the least sparkles that you see are not only worlds, but whole clusters of worlds turning about each other in the midst of space. We do not know what there may be in any of them; perhaps the answer to all our difficulties or the cure of all our sufferings: and yet we can never reach them; not all the skill of the craftiest of men can fit out a ship for the nearest of these our neighbors, nor would the life of the most aged suffice for such a journey. When a great battle has been lost, or a dear friend is dead, when we are hipped or in high spirits, there they are, unweariedly shining overhead. We may stand down here, a whole army of us together, and shout until we break our hearts, & not a whisper reaches them. We may climb the highest mountain, and we are no nearer them. All we can do is to stand down here in the garden and take off our hats; the starshine lights upon our heads, and where mine is a little bald, I dare say you can see it glisten in the darkness. The mountain and the mouse. That is like to be all

we shall ever have to do with Arcturus or Al-debaran. Can you apply a parable?" he added, laying his hand upon Will's shoulder. "It is not the same thing as a reason, but usually vastly more convincing."

Will hung his head a little, and then raised it once more to heaven. The stars seemed to expand and emit a sharper brilliancy; and, as he kept turning his eyes higher and higher, they seemed to increase in multitude under his gaze.

¶ "I see," he said, turning to the young man. "We are in a rat-trap."

"Something of that size. Did you ever see a squirrel turning in a cage? & another squirrel sitting philosophically over his nuts? I need n't ask you which of them looked more of a fool."



THE PARSON'S MARJORY



AFTER some years the old people died, both in one winter, very carefully tended by their adopted son, and very quietly mourned when they were gone. People who had heard of his roving fancies supposed he would hasten to sell the property, and go down the river to push his fortunes. But there was never any sign of such an intention on the part of Will. On the contrary, he had the inn set on a better footing, and hired a couple of servants to assist him in carrying it on; and there he settled down, a kind, talkative, inscrutable young man, six feet three in his stockings, with an iron constitution and a friendly voice. He soon began to take rank in the district as a bit of an oddity: it was not much to be wondered at from the first, for he was always full of notions, and kept calling the plainest common sense in question; but what most raised the report upon him was the odd circumstance of his courtship with the parson's Marjory.

The parson's Marjory was a lass about nine-

teen, when Will would be about thirty; well enough looking, and much better educated than any other girl in that part of the country, as became her parentage. She held her head very high, and had already refused several offers of marriage with a grand air, which had got her hard names among the neighbors. For all that, she was a good girl, and one that would have made any man well contented.

Will had never seen much of her; for, although the church and parsonage were only two miles from his own door, he was never known to go there but on Sundays. It chanced, however, that the parsonage fell into disrepair and had to be dismantled; and the parson and his daughter took lodgings for a month or so, on very much reduced terms, at Will's inn. Now, what with the inn, and the mill, and the old miller's savings, our friend was a man of substance; and besides that he had a name for good temper and shrewdness, which make a capital portion in marriage; and so it was currently gossiped, among their ill-wishers, that the parson and his daughter had not chosen their temporary lodging with their eyes shut.

**Will o' the
Mill** Will was about the last man in the world to be cajoled or frightened into marriage. You had only to look into his eyes, limpid and still like pools of water, and yet with a sort of clear light that seemed to come from within, and you would understand at once that there was one who knew his own mind, and would stand to it immovably. Marjory herself was no weakling by her looks, with strong, steady eyes and a resolute and quiet bearing. It might be a question whether she was not Will's match in steadfastness, after all, or which of them would rule the roast in marriage. But Marjory had never given it a thought, and accompanied her father with the most unshaken innocence and unconcern.

The season was still so early that Will's customers were few and far between; but the lilacs were already flowering, and the weather was so mild that the party took dinner under the trellis, with the noise of the river in their ears, and the woods ringing about them with the songs of birds. Will soon began to take a particular pleasure in these dinners. The parson was rather a dull companion, with a habit of

dozing at table; but nothing rude or cruel ever fell from his lips. And as for the parson's daughter, she suited her surroundings with the best grace imaginable; and whatever she said seemed so pat and pretty that Will conceived a great idea of her talents. He could see her face as she leaned forward against a background of rising pine woods; her eyes shone peaceably; the light lay around her hair like a kerchief; something that was hardly a smile rippled her pale cheeks, and Will could not contain himself from gazing on her in an agreeable dismay. She looked, even in her quietest moments, so complete in herself, and so quick with life down to her finger tips and the very skirts of her dress, that the remainder of created things became no more than a blot by comparison; and if Will glanced away from her to her surroundings, the trees looked inanimate and senseless, the clouds hung in heaven like dead things, and even the mountain-tops were disenchanted. The whole valley could not compare in looks with this one girl.

Will was always observant in the society of his fellow-creatures; but his observation

Will o' the became almost painfully eager in the case of
Will Marjory. He listened to all she uttered, and read her eyes, at the same time, for the unspoken commentary. Many kind, simple, and sincere speeches found an echo in his heart. He became conscious of a soul beautifully poised upon itself, nothing doubting, nothing desiring, clothed in peace. It was not possible to separate her thoughts from her appearance. The turn of her wrist, the still sound of her voice, the light in her eyes, the lines of her body, fell in tune with her grave and gentle words, like the accompaniment that sustains and harmonizes the voice of the singer. Her influence was one thing, not to be divided or discussed, only to be felt with gratitude and joy. To Will, her presence recalled something of his childhood, and the thought of her took its place in his mind besides that of dawn, of running water, and of the earliest violets and lilacs. It is the property of things seen for the first time, or for the first time after long, like the flowers in spring, to reawaken in us the sharp edge of sense and that impression of mystic strangeness which otherwise passes out

of life with the coming of years ; but the sight of a loved face is what renews a man's character from the fountain upwards.

Will o' the Mill

One day after dinner Will took a stroll among the firs ; a grave beatitude possessed him from top to toe, and he kept smiling to himself and the landscape as he went. The river ran between the stepping-stones with a pretty wimple ; a bird sang loudly in the wood ; the hilltops looked immeasurably high, and as he glanced at them from time to time, seemed to contemplate his movements with a beneficent but awful curiosity. His way took him to the eminence which overlooked the plain ; and there he sat down upon a stone, and fell into a deep and pleasant thought. The plain lay abroad with its cities and silver river ; everything was asleep, except a great eddy of birds which kept rising and falling, and going round and round in the blue air. He repeated Marjory's name aloud, and the sound of it gratified his ear. He shut his eyes, and her image sprang up before him, quietly luminous, and attended with good thoughts. The river might run forever ; the birds fly higher and higher till they touched

Will o' the the stars. He saw it was empty bustle after all ;
Mill for here, without stirring a foot, waiting patient-
ly in his own narrow valley, he also had at-
tained the better sunlight.

The next day Will made a sort of declaration across the dinner-table, while the parson was filling his pipe.

"Miss Marjory," he said, "I never knew any one I liked so well as you. I am mostly a cold, unkindly sort of a man ; not from want of heart, but out of strangeness in my way of thinking ; and people seem far away from me. 'T is as if there were a circle around me, which kept every one out but you ; I can hear the others talking and laughing, but you come quite close. Maybe this is disagreeable to you ?" he asked.

Marjory made no answer.

"Speak up, girl," said the parson.

"Nay, now," returned Will, "I would n't press her, parson. I feel tongue-tied myself, who am not used to it ; and she 's a woman, and little more than a child, when all is said. But for my part, as far as I can understand what people mean by it, I fancy I must be what they call

in love. I do not wish to be held as committing myself; for I may be wrong: but that is how I believe things are with me. And if Miss Marjory should feel any otherwise on her part, mayhap she would be so kind as shake her head."

¶ Marjory was silent, and gave no sign that she had heard.

"How is that, parson?" asked Will.

"The girl must speak," replied the parson, laying down his pipe. "Here's our neighbor who says he loves you, Madge. Do you love him, ay or no?"

"I think I do," said Marjory faintly.

"Well, then, that's all that could be wished!" cried Will, heartily. And he took her hand across the table, and held it a moment in both of his with great satisfaction.

"You must marry," observed the parson, replacing his pipe in his mouth.

"Is that the right thing to do, think you?" demanded Will.

"It is indispensable," said the parson.

"Very well," replied the wooer.

Two or three days passed away with great delight to Will, although a bystander might

Will o' the
Mill

Will o' the scarce have found it out. He continued to take
Mill his meals opposite Marjory, and to talk with her and gaze upon her in her father's presence; but he made no attempt to see her alone, nor in any other way changed his conduct towards her from what it had been since the beginning. Perhaps the girl was a little disappointed, and perhaps not unjustly; and yet if it had been enough to be always in the thoughts of another person, and so pervade and alter his whole life, she might have been thoroughly contented. For she was never out of Will's mind for an instant. He sat over the stream, and watched the dust of the eddy, and the poised fish, and straining weeds; he wandered out alone into the purple even, with all the blackbirds piping round him in the wood; he rose early in the morning, and saw the sky turn from gray to gold, and the light leap upon hilltops; and all the while he kept wondering if he had never seen such things before, or how it was that they should look so different now. The sound of his own mill-wheel, or of the wind among the trees, confounded and charmed his heart. The most enchanting thoughts presented themselves un-

bidden in his mind. He was so happy that he could not sleep at night, and so restless that he could hardly sit still out of her company. And yet it seemed as if he avoided her rather than sought her out.

One day, as he was coming home from a ramble, Will found Marjory in the garden picking flowers, and, as he came up with her, slackened his pace and continued walking by her side.

“You like flowers?” he said.

“Indeed I love them dearly,” she replied. “Do you?”

“Why, no,” said he, “not so much. They are a very small affair, when all is done. I can fancy people caring for them greatly, but not doing as you are just now.”

“How?” she asked, pausing and looking up at him.

“Plucking them,” said he. “They are a deal better off where they are, and look a deal prettier, if you go to that.”

“I wish to have them for my own,” she answered, “to carry them near my heart, and keep them in my room. They tempt me when they grow here; they seem to say, ‘Come and

Will o' the do something with us;' but once I have cut
Mill them and put them by, the charm is laid, and
I can look at them with quite an easy heart."

¶ "You wish to possess them," replied Will,
"in order to think no more about them. It 's a
bit like killing the goose with the golden eggs.
It 's a bit like what I wished to do when I was
a boy. Because I had a fancy for looking out
over the plain, I wished to go down there—
where I could n't look out over it any longer.
Was not that fine reasoning? Dear, dear, if
they only thought of it, all the world would do
like me; and you would let your flowers alone,
just as I stay up here in the mountains." Sud-
denly he broke off sharp. "By the Lord!" he
cried. And when she asked him what was
wrong, he turned the question off, and walked
away into the house with rather a humorous
expression of face.

He was silent at table; and, after the night had
fallen and the stars had come out overhead, he
walked up and down for hours in the court-
yard and garden with an uneven pace. There
was still a light in the window of Marjory's
room, one little oblong patch of orange in a

world of dark-blue hills and silver starlight. Will o' the
Will's mind ran a great deal on the window; Mill
but his thoughts were not very lover-like.
"There she is in her room," he thought, "and
there are the stars overhead;—a blessing upon
both!" Both were good influences in this life;
both soothed and braced him in his profound
contentment with the world. And what more
should he desire with either? The fat young
man and his counsels were so present to his
mind that he threw back his head, and, putting
his hands before his mouth, shouted aloud to
the populous heavens. Whether from the posi-
tion of his head or the sudden strain of the
exertion, he seemed to see a momentary shock
among the stars, and a diffusion of frosty light
pass from one to another along the sky. At the
same instant a corner of the blind was lifted up
and lowered again at once. He laughed a loud
ho-ho! "One and another!" thought Will.
"The stars tremble, and the blind goes up.
Why, before Heaven, what a great magician I
must be! Now, if I were only a fool, should
not I be in a pretty way?" And he went off to
bed, chuckling to himself, "If I were only a

Will o' the fool!" ¶ The next morning, pretty early, he saw her once more in the garden, and sought her out.

¶ "I have been thinking about getting married," he began abruptly; "and, after having turned it all over, I have made up my mind it's not worth while."

She turned upon him for a single moment; but his radiant, kindly appearance would, under the circumstances, have disconcerted an angel, and she looked down again upon the ground in silence. He could see her tremble.

"I hope you don't mind," he went on, a little taken aback. "You ought not. I have turned it all over, and upon my soul there's nothing in it. We should never be one whit nearer than we are just now, and, if I am a wise man, nothing like so happy."

"It is unnecessary to go round about with me," she said. "I very well remember that you refused to commit yourself; and now that I see you are mistaken, and in reality have never cared for me, I can only feel sad that I have been so far misled."

"I ask your pardon," said Will stoutly; "you

do not understand my meaning. As to whether I have ever loved you or not, I must leave that to others. But for one thing, my feeling is not changed; and for another, you may make it your boast that you have made my whole life and character something different from what they were. I mean what I say; no less. I do not think getting married is worth while. I would rather you went on living with your father, so that I could walk over and see you once, or maybe twice, a week, as people go to church, and then we should both be all the happier between whiles. That 's my notion. But I 'll marry you if you will," he added.

"Do you know that you are insulting me?" she broke out.

"Not I, Marjory," said he; "if there is anything in a clear conscience, not I. I offer all my heart's best affections; you can take it or want it, though I suspect it 's beyond either your power or mine to change what has once been done and set me fancy-free. I 'll marry you, if you like; but I tell you again and again, it 's not worth while, and we had best stay friends. Though I am a quiet man, I have noticed a

Will o' the heap of things in my life. Trust in me, and take
Mill things as I propose; or, if you don't like that,
say the word, and I 'll marry you out of hand."

¶ There was a considerable pause, and Will, who began to feel uneasy, began to grow angry in consequence.

"It seems you are too proud to say your mind," he said. "Believe me, that 's a pity. A clean shift makes simple living. Can a man be more downright or honorable to a woman than I have been? I have said my say, and given you your choice. Do you want me to marry you? or will you take my friendship, as I think best? or have you had enough of me for good? Speak out, for the dear God's sake! You know your father told you a girl should speak her mind in these affairs."

She seemed to recover herself at that, turned without a word, walked rapidly through the garden, and disappeared into the house, leaving Will in some confusion as to the result. He walked up and down the garden, whistling softly to himself. Sometimes he stopped and contemplated the sky and hilltops; sometimes he went down to the tail of the weir and sat

there, looking foolishly in the water. All this dubiety and perturbation was so foreign to his nature and the life which he had resolutely chosen for himself, that he began to regret Marjory's arrival. "After all," he thought, "I was as happy as a man need be. I could come down here and watch my fishes all day long if I wanted; I was as settled and contented as my old mill."

Marjory came down to dinner, looking very trim and quiet; and no sooner were all three at table than she made her father a speech, with her eyes fixed upon her plate, but showing no other sign of embarrassment or distress.

¶ "Father," she began, "Mr. Will and I have been talking things over. We see that we have each made a mistake about our feelings, and he has agreed, at my request, to give up all idea of marriage, and be no more than my very good friend, as in the past. You see, there is no shadow of a quarrel, and indeed I hope we shall see a great deal of him in the future, for his visits will always be welcome in our house. Of course, father, you will know best, but perhaps we should do better to leave Mr. Will's house for

Will o' the the present. I believe, after what has passed,
mill we should hardly be agreeable inmates for some days."

Will, who had commanded himself with difficulty from the first, broke out upon this into an inarticulate noise, and raised one hand with an appearance of real dismay, as if he were about to interfere and contradict. But she checked him at once, looking up at him with a swift glance and an angry flush upon her cheek.

"You will, perhaps, have the good grace," she said, "to let me explain these matters for myself."

Will was put entirely out of countenance by her expression and the ring of her voice. He held his peace, concluding that there were some things about this girl beyond his comprehension, in which he was exactly right. ¶ The poor parson was quite crestfallen. He tried to prove that this was no more than a true lovers' tiff, which would pass off before night; & when he was dislodged from that position, he went on to argue that where there was no quarrel there could be no call for a separation; for the good man liked both his entertainment and his

host. It was curious to see how the girl managed them, saying little all the time, and that very quietly, and yet twisting them round her finger, and insensibly leading them wherever she would by feminine tact and generalship. It scarcely seemed to have been her doing,—it seemed as if things had merely so fallen out,—that she and her father took their departure that same afternoon in a farm-cart, and went farther down the valley, to wait, until their own house was ready for them, in another hamlet. But Will had been observing closely, and was well aware of her dexterity and resolution. When he found himself alone he had a great many curious matters to turn over in his mind. He was very sad and solitary to begin with. All the interest had gone out of his life, and he might look up at the stars as long as he pleased, he somehow failed to find support or consolation. And then he was in such a turmoil of spirit about Marjory. He had been puzzled and irritated at her behavior, and yet he could not keep himself from admiring it. He thought he recognized a fine perverse angel in that still soul which he had never hitherto suspected;

Will o' the and, though he saw it was an influence that
Mill would fit but ill with his own life of artificial calm, he could not keep himself from ardently desiring to possess it. Like a man who has lived among shadows and now meets the sun, he was both pained and delighted.

As the days went forward he passed from one extreme to another; now pluming himself on the strength of his determination, now despising his timid and silly caution. The former was, perhaps, the true thought of his heart, and represented the regular tenor of the man's reflections; but the latter burst forth from time to time with an unruly violence, and then he would forget all consideration, and go up and down his house and garden or walk among the fir woods like one who is beside himself with remorse. To equable, steady-minded Will this state of matters was intolerable; and he determined, at whatever cost, to bring it to an end. So one warm summer afternoon he put on his best clothes, took a thorn switch in his hand, and set out down the valley by the river. As soon as he had taken his determination he had regained at a bound his customary peace of

heart, and he enjoyed the bright weather and the variety of the scene without any admixture of alarm or unpleasant eagerness. It was nearly the same to him how the matter turned out. If she accepted him, he would have to marry her this time, which perhaps was all for the best. If she refused him, he would have done his utmost, and might follow his own way in the future with an untroubled conscience. He hoped, on the whole, she would refuse him; and then, again, as he saw the brown roof which sheltered her, peeping through some willows at an angle of the stream, he was half inclined to reverse the wish, and more than half ashamed of himself for this infirmity of purpose.

Marjory seemed glad to see him, and gave him her hand without affectation or delay.

"I have been thinking about this marriage," he began.

"So have I," she answered. "And I respect you more and more for a very wise man. You understood me better than I understood myself; and I am now quite certain that things are all for the best as they are."

Will o' the "At the same time—" ventured Will.

Will "You must be tired," she interrupted. "Take a seat and let me fetch you a glass of wine. The afternoon is so warm; and I wish you not to be displeased with your visit. You must come quite often; once a week, if you can spare the time; I am always so glad to see my friends."

"Oh, very well," thought Will to himself. "It appears I was right after all." And he paid a very agreeable visit, walked home again in capital spirits, and gave himself no further concern about the matter.

For nearly three years Will and Marjory continued on these terms, seeing each other once or twice a week without any word of love between them; and for all that time I believe Will was nearly as happy as a man can be. He rather stinted himself the pleasure of seeing her; and he would often walk half-way over to the parsonage, and then back again, as if to whet his appetite. Indeed there was one corner of the road, whence he could see the church spire wedged into a crevice of the valley between sloping fir woods, with a triangular

snatch of plain by way of background, which he greatly affected as a place to sit and moralize in before returning homewards; and the peasants got so much into the habit of finding him there in the twilight that they gave it the name of "Will o' the Mill's Corner."

At the end of the three years Marjory played him a sad trick by suddenly marrying somebody else. Will kept his countenance bravely, and merely remarked that for as little as he knew of women, he had acted very prudently in not marrying her himself three years before. She plainly knew very little of her own mind, and in spite of a deceptive manner, was as fickle and flighty as the rest of them. He had to congratulate himself on an escape, he said, and would take a higher opinion of his own wisdom in consequence. But at heart he was reasonably displeased, moped a good deal for a month or two, and fell away in flesh, to the astonishment of his serving-lads.

It was perhaps a year after this marriage that Will was awakened late one night by the sound of a horse galloping on the road, followed by precipitate knocking at the inn door. He

Will o' the opened his window and saw a farm servant,
Mill mounted and holding a led horse by the bridle,
who told him to make what haste he could and
go along with him; for Marjory was dying, and
had sent urgently to fetch him to her bedside.
Will was no horseman, and made so little
speed upon the way that the poor young wife
was very near her end before he arrived. But
they had some minutes' talk in private, and he
was present and wept very bitterly while she
~~~~~ breathed her last ~~~~~



## DEATH

Will o' the  
Mill



EAR after year went away into nothing, with great explosions and outcries in the cities on the plain,—red revolt springing up and being suppressed in blood, battle swaying hither & thither, patient astronomers in observatory towers picking out and christening new stars, plays being performed in lighted theatres, people being carried into hospital on stretchers, and all the usual turmoil and agitation of men's lives in crowded centres. Up in Will's valley only the winds and seasons made an epoch; the fish hung in the swift stream, the birds circled overhead, the pine-tops rustled underneath the stars, the tall hills stood over all; and Will went to and fro, minding his wayside inn, until the snow began to thicken on his head. His heart was young & vigorous; and if his pulses kept a sober time, they still beat strong and steady in his wrists. He carried a ruddy stain on either cheek, like a ripe apple; he stooped a little, but his step was still firm; and his sinewy hands were reached out to all men with a

**Will o' the** friendly pressure. His face was covered with  
**Mill** those wrinkles which are got in open air, and which, rightly looked at, are no more than a sort of permanent sunburning; such wrinkles heighten the stupidity of stupid faces, but to a person like Will, with his clear eyes and smiling mouth, only give another charm by testifying to a simple and easy life. His talk was full of wise sayings. He had a taste for other people; and other people had a taste for him. When the valley was full of tourists in the season, there were merry nights in Will's arbor; and his views, which seemed whimsical to his neighbors, were often enough admired by learned people out of towns and colleges. Indeed, he had a very noble old age, and grew daily better known; so that his fame was heard of in the cities of the plain; and young men who had been summer travellers spoke together in cafes of Will o' the Mill and his rough philosophy. Many and many an invitation, you may be sure, he had; but nothing could tempt him from his upland valley. He would shake his head and smile over his tobacco-pipe with a deal of meaning. "You come too late," he

would answer. "I am a dead man now; I have lived and died already. Fifty years ago you would have brought my heart into my mouth; and now you do not even tempt me. But that is the object of long living, that man should cease to care about life." And again: "There is only one difference between a long life and a good dinner,—that, in the dinner, the sweets come last." Or once more: "When I was a boy I was a bit puzzled, and hardly knew whether it was myself or the world that was curious and worth looking into. Now I know it is myself, and stick to that."

He never showed any symptoms of frailty, but kept stalwart and firm to the last; but they say he grew less talkative towards the end, and would listen to other people by the hour in an amused and sympathetic silence. Only, when he did speak, it was more to the point and more charged with old experience. He drank a bottle of wine gladly; above all, at sunset on the hilltop or quite late at night under the stars in the arbor. The sight of something attractive and unattainable seasoned his enjoyment, he would say; and he professed he had lived long

**Will o' the** enough to admire a candle all the more when  
**Mill** he could compare it with a planet.

¶ One night, in his seventy-second year, he awoke in bed, in such uneasiness of body and mind that he arose and dressed himself and went out to meditate in the arbor. It was pitch dark, without a star; the river was swollen, & the wet woods and meadows loaded the air with perfume. It had thundered during the day, and it promised more thunder for the morrow. A murky, stifling night for a man of seventy-two! Whether it was the weather or the wakefulness, or some little touch of fever in his old limbs, Will's mind was besieged by tumultuous and crying memories. His boyhood, the night with the fat young man, the death of his adopted parents, the summer days with Marjory, and many of those small circumstances which seem nothing to another, and are yet the very gist of a man's own life to himself,—things seen, words heard, looks misconstrued,—arose from their forgotten corners & usurped his attention. The dead themselves were with him, not merely taking part in this thin show of memory that defiled before his brain, but

revisiting his bodily senses as they do in profound and vivid dreams. The fat young man leaned his elbows on the table opposite; Marjory came and went with an apronful of flowers between the garden & the arbor; he could hear the old parson knocking out his pipe or blowing his resonant nose. The tide of his consciousness ebbed and flowed: he was sometimes half asleep and drowned in his recollections of the past; and sometimes he was broad awake, wondering at himself. But about the middle of the night he was startled by the voice of the dead miller calling to him out of the house as he used to do on the arrival of custom. The hallucination was so perfect that Will sprang from his seat and stood listening for the summons to be repeated; and as he listened he became conscious of another noise besides the brawling of the river & the ringing in his feverish ears. It was like the stir of the horses and the creaking of harness, as though a carriage with an impatient team had been brought up upon the road before the courtyard gate. At such an hour, upon this rough and dangerous pass, the supposition was no better

Will o' the than absurd; and Will dismissed it from his  
Mill mind, and resumed his seat upon the arbor  
chair; and sleep closed over him again like  
running water. He was once again awakened  
by the dead miller's call, thinner and more  
spectral than before; and once again he heard  
the noise of an equipage upon the road. And  
so thrice and four times the same dream, or  
the same fancy, presented itself to his senses,  
until at length, smiling to himself as when one  
humors a nervous child, he proceeded towards  
the gate to set his uncertainty at rest.

From the arbor to the gate was no great distance, & yet it took Will some time; it seemed as if the dead thickened around him in the court, and crossed his path at every step. For, first, he was suddenly surprised by an overpowering sweetness of heliotropes; it was as if his garden had been planted with this flower from end to end, and the hot, damp night had drawn forth all their perfumes in a breath. Now the heliotrope had been Marjory's favorite flower, and since her death not one of them had ever been planted in Will's ground.

"I must be going crazy," he thought. "Poor

Marjory and her heliotropes!" And with that he raised his eyes towards the window that had once been hers. If he had been bewildered before, he was now almost terrified; for there was a light in the room; the window was an orange oblong as of yore; and the corner of the blind was lifted and let fall as on the night when he stood and shouted to the stars in his perplexity. The illusion only endured an instant; but it left him somewhat unmanned, rubbing his eyes, and staring at the outline of the house and the black night behind it. While he thus stood, and it seemed as if he must have stood there quite a long time, there came a renewal of the noises on the road; and he turned in time to meet a stranger, who was advancing to meet him across the court. There was something like the outline of a great carriage discernible on the road behind the stranger, and, above that, a few black pine-tops, like so many plumes.

"Master Will?" asked the newcomer, in brief, military fashion.

"That same, sir," answered Will. "Can I do anything to serve you?"

**Will o' the** "I have heard you much spoken of, Master  
**Will** Will," returned the other; "much spoken of,  
and well. And, though I have both hands full  
of business, I wish to drink a bottle of wine  
with you in your arbor. Before I go I shall in-  
troduce myself."

Will led the way to the trellis, and got a lamp  
lighted, and a bottle uncorked. He was not al-  
together unused to such complimentary inter-  
views, and hoped little enough from this one,  
being schooled by many disappointments. A  
sort of cloud had settled on his wits and pre-  
vented him from remembering the strangeness  
of the hour. He moved like a person in his  
sleep; and it seemed as if the lamp caught  
fire and the bottle came uncorked with the fa-  
cility of thought. Still, he had some curiosity  
about the appearance of his visitor, and tried  
in vain to turn the light into his face: either he  
handled the lamp clumsily, or there was a  
dimness over his eyes; but he could make out  
little more than a shadow at table with him.  
He stared and stared at this shadow, as he  
wiped out the glasses, and began to feel cold  
& strange about the heart. The silence weighed

upon him; for he could hear nothing now, not even the river, but the drumming of his own arteries in his ears. Will o' the Mill

"Here 's to you," said the stranger roughly.

"Here is my service, sir," replied Will, sipping his wine, which somehow tasted oddly.

"I understand you are a very positive fellow," pursued the stranger.

Will made answer with a smile of some satisfaction and a little nod.

"So am I," continued the other; "and it is the delight of my heart to tramp on people's corns.

I will have nobody positive but myself; not one. I have crossed the whims, in my time, of kings and generals and great artists. And what would you say," he went on, "if I had come up here on purpose to cross yours?"

Will had it on his tongue to make a sharp rejoinder; but the politeness of an old innkeeper prevailed, and he held his peace and made answer with a civil gesture of the hand.

"I have," said the stranger. "And if I did not hold you in a particular esteem, I should make no words about the matter. It appears you pride yourself on staying where you are. You

**Will o' the** mean to stick by your inn. Now I mean you  
**Will** shall come for a turn with me in my barouche;  
and before this bottle 's empty, so you shall."

¶ "That would be an odd thing, to be sure,"  
replied Will, with a chuckle. "Why, sir, I  
have grown here like an old oak-tree; the  
Devil himself could hardly root me up: and for  
all I perceive you are a very entertaining old  
gentleman, I would wager you another bottle  
you lose your pains with me."

The dimness of Will's eyesight had been in-  
creasing all this while; but he was somehow  
conscious of a sharp & chilling scrutiny which  
irritated and yet overmastered him.

"You need not think," he broke out suddenly,  
in an explosive, febrile manner that startled  
and alarmed himself, "that I am a stay-at-  
home, because I fear anything under God.  
God knows I am tired enough of it all; and  
when the time comes for a longer journey than  
ever you dream of, I reckon I shall find my-  
self prepared."

The stranger emptied his glass and pushed it  
away from him. He looked down for a little,  
and then, leaning over the table, tapped Will

three times upon the forearm with a single finger. "The time has come!" he said solemnly. **Will o' the Will**

¶ An ugly thrill spread from the spot he touched. The tones of his voice were dull and startling, & echoed strangely in Will's heart.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with some discomposure. "What do you mean?"

"Look at me, and you will find your eyesight swim. Raise your hand; it is dead-heavy. This is your last bottle of wine, Master Will, and your last night upon the earth."

"You are a doctor?" quavered Will.

"The best that ever was," replied the other; "for I cure both mind and body with the same prescription. I take away all pain and I forgive all sins; and where my patients have gone wrong in life, I smooth out all complications and set them free again upon their feet."

"I have no need of you," said Will.

"A time comes for all men, Master Will," replied the doctor, "when the helm is taken out of their hands. For you, because you were prudent and quiet, it has been long of coming, & you have had long to discipline yourself for its reception. You have seen what is to be seen

**Will o' the** about your mill; you have sat close all your  
**Mill** days like a hare in its form: but now that is at  
an end; and," added the doctor, getting on his  
feet, "you must arise and come with me."

"You are a strange physician," said Will, looking steadfastly upon his guest.

"I am a natural law," he replied, "and people call me Death."

"Why did you not tell me so at first?" cried Will, "I have been waiting for you these many years. Give me your hand, and welcome."

"Lean upon my arm," said the stranger, "for already your strength abates. Lean on me heavily as you need; for, though I am old, I am very strong. It is but three steps to my carriage, and there all your trouble ends. Why, Will," he added, "I have been yearning for you as if you were my own son; and of all the men that ever I came for in my long days, I have come for you most gladly. I am caustic, and sometimes offend people at first sight; but I am a good friend at heart to such as you."

"Since Marjory was taken," returned Will, "I declare before God you were the only friend I had to look for."

So the pair went arm in arm across the court-  
yard. ¶ One of the servants awoke about this  
time and heard the noise of horses pawing  
before he dropped asleep again; all down the  
valley that night there was a rushing as of a  
smooth and steady wind descending towards  
the plain; and when the world rose next morn-  
ing, sure enough, Will o' the Mill had gone at  
last upon his travels

Will o' the  
Mill



SO HERE ENDETH "WILL O' THE MILL" AS  
WRITTEN BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON:  
THE PORTRAIT, ORNAMENTS AND INITIALS  
BY SAMUEL WARNER, THE TYPOGRAPHY  
BY ANDREW ANDREWS, AND THE WHOLE  
DONE INTO A BOOK BY THE ROYCROFT-  
ERS AT THEIR SHOP, WHICH IS IN EAST  
AURORA, ERIE COUNTY, NEW YORK, U. S. A.











